

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

or

‘Will you recognise Him?’

Acts 2. 14a, 36 – 41

1 Peter 1. 17-23

Luke 24. 13 - 35

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

‘On that same day’, two of our Lord’s followers were going to a village called Emmaus. ‘That same day’ is the same day that the women went to the tomb of Jesus; it is the same day that they saw the angels; it is the same day that Christ appeared to Mary; it is the same day that our Lord first appeared to Peter; and it is that same day, as we learn from our text, that Jesus appeared to a group of the disciples.

That busy Sunday morning, Cleopas¹ and the other disciple must have left the place where the disciples gathered almost immediately after the return from the tomb. Why did they leave? Where were they going in such a hurry? With all that was happening on that day, why leave?

These two disciples were not casually travelling to the next town. It is very likely that they were fleeing. They were running away. Their conversation on that day was not idle talk to pass the time. It was fevered, if somewhat incoherent exchange, struggling to understand, struggling to make sense of all that had happened in the past week. They were in shock; they were afraid; they were angry; they were disappointed and hurt. They left Jerusalem to find a place of safety. Emmaus was a small village seven miles northwest from Jerusalem, but it could have been any place, north, south, east or west – just a place to get away from the terrible things that they had just witnessed.

¹ See also Jn 19. 25.

And there, on the way to Emmaus, Cleopas and his friend are suddenly accompanied by a stranger. He does not say who he is; he simply asks what they have been discussing. And so the two disciples pour out their story to this person who seems so willing to listen. They tell the stranger about their hopes and their disappointments. Little did they know that this walk was going to be the most significant walk in their lives.

As Cleopas and his friend talked about the cross, their bewilderment and their sorrow, Christ reassured them and helped them. But before he did so, he chided them saying, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And then, having challenged the two disciples, our Lord went on to explain precisely what is said in the Scriptures concerning himself.

We do not have a precise record of the exchange between Jesus and the two disciples; but we can surmise what the nature of his teaching was. With great patience and with perfect clarity, he showed them that how the Scriptures point ahead to him, to his mission, and to his fulfilment of his mission.

As Christ, the living Word, opened the Word of God to his disciples, he made ‘sense’ out of things. He gave them a view of the big picture; he helped them to see things that they couldn’t see for themselves; things that were beyond their immediate perspective. It’s as if the disciples were stuck, looking at one piece of a very large puzzle, and our Lord gave them a view of what the whole puzzle was all about.

Finally, the two disciples arrive at Emmaus; and when our Lord (whom they have still not recognised) acts as if he is going on further, they urge him to stay with him. They go into an inn, and Jesus, who is in fact the invited guest of the disciples, suddenly takes on the role of host; he takes bread, gives thanks, and gives it to them.

Of course, this moment reminds us of the many occasions when Christ ate with the twelve disciples, and particularly of his last supper with them before his crucifixion, when he instituted the practice of Holy Communion. At that table in the inn at Emmaus, as our Lord breaks the bread, the eyes of the two disciples are opened, and they see Jesus for who he really is. And then he disappears from their sight.

This scene that occurs at the inn is an amazing one, one that has been imagined and captured by some of the world's greatest painters. Today, as we think about the implications of the story of the road to Emmaus, we might ask ourselves several questions.

The first question is this: 'Do we truly recognise, or see Christ today for who he is and for what he is able to do?' At that table at the inn in Emmaus, and still today, Christ is our risen Lord who suffered so that sin, death and evil might be conquered. He is, as the disciples said themselves in our text, the one who is 'mighty in deed and word' (24. 19). This same risen Jesus, who has now entered in to glory, has made himself available to us now. He is able to help us with our problems; he is able to help us with our struggles and temptations; he is able to help us be faithful to him as we desire to become more like him.

A second question that we might ask ourselves is, 'Are we truly listening and waiting for Christ's revelation and words?' We have already seen that when our Lord, the living Word of God, explained the Word of God to the disciples, they finally understood and their hearts were burning. Jesus comes to us, with his own words and with the words of Scripture, to make sense of our lives and to bring us life. As he speaks to us, his light fills the rooms of our lives.

There might be some of us here who think that our ability to receive Christ's revelation and words is blocked somehow, for different reasons. Perhaps we feel

that our walk with God has become boring and dull; or perhaps we feel that we are less receptive to our Lord because there are things or circumstances that hinder us from hearing or receiving him as we should. Whatever our attitude or circumstances may be, he is available to reveal himself afresh in vivid reality and colour, and to shed his light upon us.

Thirdly and finally, we might ask ourselves, 'In what ways am I allowing myself to be nourished by Christ?' As we consider this story, we remember that even though our Lord was invited to the inn at Emmaus by the disciples, he ultimately became their host and broke bread with them. Even today, Jesus desires to be the one who nourishes us with his own body and blood; the one who provides food for our souls; the one who provides us with spiritual sustenance; the one with whom we have intimate fellowship.

This Eastertide, the risen Christ makes himself available to us, not only to reveal himself in his power and to speak his words to us; but also to nourish us sacramentally and spiritually. May we be given grace to see him afresh; to receive his words; and to feed on him in our hearts.

Amen.